CHAPTER ONE

The New Front

A series of violent, incessant B52 bomb explosions shook the headquarters bunker of the Regional Command. Immediately afterwards loudspeakers hanging from tree limbs announced the report of the area duty officer: "Nine B52's divided into three groups dropped three strings of bombs across Zone A and between B1* and B2**. Everyone is safe."

We continued the conference. A staff cadre arrived to report that "The Central Staff has sent a message informing us that the Paris Agreement had been signed!"

I instinctively smiled and thought about those strange final minutes between war and peace, if indeed there was to be peace. It seemed that, significantly, the Americans had made full use of the final minutes of a war that had lasted decades by sending B52 steel crows to send "messages of reconciliation!"

Even so, news that the Paris Agreement had been signed caused everyone to breathe a sigh of relief. Joyful expressions appeared on the faces of the commanders. Those faces were all weatherworn: everyone looked thin but healthy. Was that not a valuable prize for nearly 10 months of continuous fighting all over the theater to force the enemy to sign an agreement to end hostilities and conclude a strategic phase?

Never before had a military activity campaign been as prolonged and as increasingly intensive as during the recent period. The military regions and units reported to the Regional Command the victories they had won, and the positions our troops had taken from the enemy hour by hour, but at the same time there were continual reports about the difficulties, the shortages of troops, food, and ammunition, and especially the fatigue of the cadres and men. The Military Region 9 Command (western Nam Bo) sent a message recommending straightforwardly that the Regional Command order an immediate cessation of hostilities so that we could reorganize our forces. The troops were no longer capable of fighting! But the enemy was extremely obstinate. They had been painfully defeated on the battlefield, had been outnegotiated at the conference table, and had been forced to sign in October, but had then reneged on their promise. So what should we do? Conclude our activities and rest, at a time when our objectives had not been attained? No! We had to continue to fight. We would fight until they understood the will of revolutionaries.

The difficulty was deciding what to do at that time. If we stopped, things would go in one direction. If we made a little more effort and won a few more victories we would bring about a qualitative change and things would go in another direction. That is what we did. We made a little more effort and won a few more victories in South Vietnam at a time when it was thought that we were exhausted and could no longer fight because we were out of rice and

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* The Regional Command

** The Regional Staff

ammunition. We were steadfast, fought back intelligently and proudly, and shot down large numbers of B52's and other airplanes during 12 long days and nights in Hanoi and Hai Phong, as if something miraculous had happened, as in the ancient myth of Lac and the dragon. And clearly, we were able to create a new quality. The enemy--the leading, most dangerous and cruelest imperialist country of the era--had to bow its head and submit. They had to sign an agreement to end the war and restore peace in Vietnam and agree to completely withdraw the U.S. and puppet troops from South Vietnam and recognize the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Vietnam.

"Fight until the Americans get out and the puppets collapse.
"Advance! The soldiers and people of the
"North and South will meet in a happier spring."

Dear Uncle Ho! We had carried out to a decisive degree your instruction of a previous year, which manifested the skilled policy of the state. Once the Americans got out the puppets would have to get out and the north and south would be reunited. We pledged to go all-out to achieve his dream as soon as possible.

The decisive turning point of the war had been created. A difficult route had been traversed with great effort and we gathered together all our strength to travel the remaining distance, which might prove to be no less complicated and difficult. But we could see rosy rays of light on the horizon.

On a Monday in January 1973, at the Regional Command Headquarters, in a bunker in the middle of a jungle base area, the atmosphere was bustling and seething. We were monitoring the situation on the battlefield and the units, but our focus was on urgently discussing a plan and measures for implementing the Paris Agreement strictly and effectively. Many tasks had to be carried out: quickly reorganizing our forces, being vigilant toward the enemy, whom we had known well for a long time, etc. Suddenly a staff cadre entered and handed comrade Nam Nga (i.e. Maj Gen Nguyen Minh Chau), regional chief of staff at that time, an urgent message. Comrade Nam Nga quickly read the message then, with a serious expression that could have meant either happiness or worry, handed it to me. The message said that the Central Committee had appointed me head of the military delegation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam to the Four-Party Joint Military Commission in Saigon. Oh! How sudden! The Central Office [COSVN] and the Regional Military Party Committee had decided on the make-up of the delegation in advance, and it had already been approved by the Central Committee, but now there was a sudden, last-minute change. In only 3 more days I would have to be in Saigon!.

During my several decades as a soldier I had experienced many surprises, on the battlefield, in my work, and from people--both friends and enemies--but that surprise both pleased and worried me. It worried me because I was unfamiliar with such work and the time was too pressing: I had to pack and set out before I had time to get a handle on the job, let alone making full preparations for the new struggle front, which was completely different from the battlefield. However, that was not the first time I had been surprised by an assignment from the upper echelon. I was used to it. I had confidence in the

leadership of the upper echelon and in my colleagues, and confidence in myself. I calmly accepted my responsibility. In fact, in this instance there was greater enjoyment in it for me. My beloved Saigon! For a long time, during the era of the French colonialists, I had lived, engaged in seething revolutionary activities, won victories, and tasted defeat there. I had been away from the city fighting for decades, and was now returning in full view of the people and my comrades, and within the thick encirclement of the enemy. The streets, markets, factories, poor workers' neighborhoods which I knew in the past had now certainly changed greatly, but even so I still had memories of other people from Saigon, like myself, who decided to leave so that they could later return in triumph. Once before I had tried to return but couldn't. This time, although it was not to be a permanent return, was as delightful as a beautful dream. Every minute many imagined images of Saigon, both in the past and in the present, passed across my mind like a roll of film. When he saw me sitting in silence, comrade Muoi Khang (i.e. Senior General Hoang Van Thai, then a lieutenant general), asked me, "What else can you do but accept the mission? Congratulations!"

He then came up to shake my hand and hug and kiss me, and suddenly the room was echoing with congratulations and requests, and was tumultuous with the sound of laughter. There was no longer the atmosphere of a meeting. I exchanged a few pleasantries with Muoi Khang, then requested permission to prepare for my trip to Saigon. Muoi Khang would care for everything for me at home.

When I went back to my house and looked around at what had been familiar surroundings for years, I was suddenly saddened by the prospect of leaving. A light breeze blew in, bringing along the sweet scents of a myriad of flowers in the green jungle. In front of the house, in a narrow field extending along the valley, flocks of small birds hastily gleaned the grains of rice which were dropped during the recent harvest. The stream running along the fields was winding its way under rows of trees that were leafless because of the bombing and shelling. There had just appeared a few fresh young saplings. Every object that day seemed to have an overflowing, fresh, affectionate soul. I don't know how long I would have sat there meditating if Chin Vinh (Maj Gen Tran Do) and Hai Le (Maj Gen Le Van Tuong), the deputy political officer and political director of the Regional Command, had not come in and pulled me back to reality.

"Do you need anything else? Are you satisfied with the organization and composition of your Joint Commission delegation?" asked Chin Vinh.

I agreed to maintain unchanged everything that had been arranged, and only requested the addition of comrade Tu Bon (Senior Colonel Nguyen Huu Tri), an intelligence cadre and Army Hero who had lived in Saigon more than 3 years and who had come to the base only a few months previously, after learning that he had been compromised. He was an expert on Saigon and knew all of its streets and many people in various circles in the city. In addition to helping me carry out a number of tasks, he would be my driver if the enemy agreed to let us provide our own drivers.

Hai Le informed me that "The Central Committee had requested you to tell it what name you intend to use so that it can be passed on to Paris. Our delegation must inform the U.S.-puppet side."

Like everyone else, I had never used my real name, but had habitually used a code name, which I had changed now and then to make it difficult for the enemy to monitor me and maintain secrecy for our operations. The usual practice in wartime was for us to use a different name for each task during each phase. Now, faced with a new mission, I would meet the enemy face to face and would of course have to choose a name. Almost without thinking, I took the name "Nguyen Viet Chau," the name of a younger brother with whom I had been very close and who was killed in 1969 when he was presiding over a meeting of the party committee of Can Tho City. My brother and I had lived in Saigon, had participated together in secret revolutionary activity there during the period of French domination, had been released from a French prison at the same time, had participated together in the August 1945 uprising, and had left our beloved Saigon to take part in the resistance war. Now I was returning to that city and naturally thought about my esteemed younger brother, my comrade in death as well as in life. I was happy to take that unforgettable name. But then ond day, during an ordinary meal at the Regional Command at which Bay Cuong (comrade Pham Hung, a member of the Political Bureau and secretary of COSVN) was present, I suddenly remembered that I was not returning to Saigon as a stranger but was going under an assumed name, which would be inconvenient.

Many of the people of Saigon could not forget their children who had gone to fight in the resistance war years ago and in whom they had placed their confidence and hope. And a considerable number of the enemy, such as Tran Thien Khiem, the puppet premier, Lam Van Phat, a puppet major general, and a number of others, knew me. After graduating from the French military academy in Dalat they went to Dong Thap Muoi to join the resistance. As the commander of Military Region 8 at that time, I accepted and sent them to study and practice at the military region military administration school. But then, because they could not bear the hardships and did not love their country or their people, they deserted, surrendered to the French, and continued to serve their French, and the American, masters. Even the Americans might have dozens of photographs of me. Thus it would be best to use a name with which everyone, friend and foe alike, was familiar. The members of COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission agreed. Thus I recommended that the Central Committee agree to the change and send a message to Paris so that the other side could be informed that the head of the delegation of the PRG of the RSVN would be Lt Gen Tran Van Tra.

Within a short period of time I drafted a plan to prepare in all ways for my new assignment, reviewed the organization of the delegation, and discussed in detail with Ba Tran (Maj Gen Tran Van Danh) the mission, personnel, documents, and facilities, especially the communications-liaison facilities, foresaw contingencies, decided on the measures, and assigned Ba Tran, the deputy delegation head, to represent me in directing all implementation tasks.

Ba Tran, who was born in Hoc Mon, grew up in Saigon and joined the anti-French resistance war in 1945, was the regional deputy chief of staff and was responsible for organizing and guiding the delegation and for strategic guidance.

He was an expert on Saigon and knew a good deal about the enemy. I had confidence in his ability and thought that the enemy would also respect him because he was robust, fair-skinned, stout, muscular and proper.

I attended a Regional Command meeting, in which the staff, political, rear services, and other organs participated, to discuss in detail all measures for coordinating struggle between the conference table and the battlefield. I emphasized that if the enemy respected us at the four-party conference table in Saigon and we were victorious in implementing the Paris Agreements, that it would principally be due to the strength of our troops and to our comrades on the outside. We promised that we would be worthy of being representatives of the heroic people's armed liberation forces of the South in the middle of the enemy's capital and in the bosom of our beloved compatriots.

We were due in Saigon on 28 January 1973. We had agreed to a time for the Americans to pick us up by helicopter at Thien Ngon, a location in northern Tay Ninh on National Route 22. In the past, Thien Ngon had been a small settlement of people who earned their living in the forest. During the war the Americans chased away all the people and built a strongpoint there for a U.S. brigade. It had an airfield, a supply depot, and a drill ground. From it were launched sweeping operations in the surrounding areas. At the beginning of 1972--by that time the puppet army had replaced the Americans--Thien Ngon was the main focus of the "Nguyen Hue" campaign.* In the course of our campaign we completely eliminated that strongpoint. Thus Thien Ngon was then only an old, desolate battlefield on which the vegetation had been burned and the surface of which was scarred by bomb and shell craters and littered with the hulks of U.S. tanks, armored vehicles, artillery and trucks, which were strewn all over. There remained only a runway usuable only by helicopters. After informing the enemy of the pick-up time we sent a reconnaissance team to Thien Ngon to rebuild some old bunkers, in which we would await the enemy before, during and after the appointed time. The members of that team reported to us every 15 minutes on all developments in the situation there. Meanwhile, a fully equipped delegation of cadres prepared our actual departure point at the Loc Ninh airfield. Our delegation organized a leisurely Tet celebration in advance. We knew that when we arrived in Saigon we would have to urgently begin work, even though the lunar New Year was only 4 or 5 days away, so we wanted to enjoy a Tet "at home," in our free, liberated area, that was embued with friendship between those leaving and those remaining behind. Celebrate Tet in advance! We were only repeating something that had happened several times in the history of our people's combat. Quang Trung-Nguyen Hue had his troops celebrate Tet in advance in 1789 at the Tam Diep bivouac area before they advanced on Thang Long, destroyed the Manchu-Ch'ing army, won a brilliant victory at Dong Da, and permanently ended the Chinese protectorate in our country. In the spring of 1968 the South celebrated Tet in advance--Tet Mau Than--so that it could carry out the general offensive and uprising, smash the aggressive will of the U.S. imperialists, create a crisis in the White House, scare the Pentagon to death, and force the United States to deescalate the war, negotiate with us at Paris, then conclude the endlessly long conference during the spring of 1973. This spring--the spring of 1973--we were again celebrating

*Our offensive campaign in eastern Nam Bo in 1972.

Tet in advance so that we could go into the very lair of the enemy, force them to correctly implement the agreements, and see what tricks they would play and what they truly wanted.

The Tet feat in the bunker of the Regional Command was very flavorful. It was not very elegant but there were Tet cakes, including glutinous rice cakes, pork, both from pigs we had raised and from wild pigs, and with watermelon, liqueur, local products, and products from Hanoi. The comrades at COSVN, the Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, the government, and the Regional Command, representatives of the mass association organs, and even a reporter from the liberation press, etc., joined in the festivities with the members of our delegation. The atmosphere was truly intimate and cosy. Happiness spread over everyone's face. The happiness increased with every glass of liqueur. We toasted the victory, pledged to meet again under even more auspicious circumstances, and toasted the success both at the conference table and on the battlefield. In the midst of the Tet meal, when the conversation was deafening, we received a message from Thien Ngon: "At the appointed hour the U.S. helicopters did not arrive to pick up the delegation. Instead, two enemy airplanes circled twice and dropped bombs around the air strip. Bomb fragments and fragments of the hulks of tanks and armored vehicles flew over our bunker. Then there was silence." Everyone poured some more liqueur and lifted their glasses to toast the health of the delegation members, to toast our cleverness and vigilance, and to warmly toast our delegation's first victory over the cowardly treachery of the Americans and their puppets. The conversation during the meal became even more resounding because of discussions about the Thien Ngon incident, the U.S.-puppet capability to violate the Paris Agreements, and the complications of our mission and of our work on the battlefield. Despite all that, everyone was burning with strong confidence, confidence in the inevitability of our victory under any circumstances. Everyone's eyes were alive with the brilliant vitality of spring. Outside, rays of sunlight shining through the foliage illuminated the jungle. The weather was dry, cool and pleasant. Everywhere, along the roads, there were streaks of white flowers, interspersed with the shiny golden color of wild apricot blossoms. This year spring came early in the base area, and the vegetation seemed to compete in responding to the happiness of victory.

Loc Ninh, a highly populated, prosperous town in the liberated area of eastern Nam Bo, was situated 100 kilometers from Saigon on National Route 13, which extends into Kampuchea and then Laos. Extending northward was National Route 14, which went to Ban Me Thuot and the Central Highlands. Extending southward was Route 17, which connected with our northern Tay Ninh base area. After it was liberated in April 1972, Loc Ninh became an important military position which threatened the enemy's defense of Saigon, and was a political center of the liberated B2 area. Loc Ninh, in the fertile red-soil area, which was appropriate for the growing of tropical crops, had vast rubber plantations left over from the French colonial period and luxuriant orchards of all kinds of fruit--durians, rambutans, mangos, milk fruit, etc.--and hundreds of hectares of valuable pepper and coffee. In the past Loc Ninh had been a district seat in Binh Long Province, a strong point which lay within the puppet III Corps' outer perimeter for the defense of Saigon. During our "Nguyen Hue" campaign, Loc

Ninh was the principal objective and the most important position that had to be taken on the enemy's outer defensive perimeter. We not only wiped out a fortified brigade-level base but also wiped out many tank and armored regiments and many powerful task forces of the puppets' III Corps, and captured many POW's and officers, including Colonel Vinh, whom we later, out of humanitarianism and to demonstrate our good will, returned to the United States and its puppets. For those reasons, Loc Ninh had come to symbolize our victory and the disgraceful defeat of the enemy. We wanted the enemy to send helicopters to pick up our delegation at Loc Ninh so that they would remember that terrible blow. From that glorious spot, our delegation would proudly enter the puppet capital.

Immediately after they committed treachery by bombing the designated Thien Ngon location, we vigorously protested and demanded that they pick us up at Loc Ninh. Each time they disgracefully failed in an attack on us they had to be brought to their senses by the strength of their adversary. We hoped that they would not dare play any more dirty tricks, although we were fully prepared, for we knew that the enemy's nature would never change. After bombing Thien Ngon in order to wipe out our delegation to the Central Joint Military Commission, which we protested, they sent troops to carry out sweeping operations and bombed the locations designated as pick-up points for our delegations to the joint military commissions in the Pleiky and My Tho regions and to the local joint military teams in Phu Bai, Da Lat, Kontum, and Tan An. They continually took advantage of every small opportunity, regardless of reason or of the provisions of the agreement, to carry out schemes and plots in hopes of annihilating us--every person and every hamlet--if they could. Every time they did so we vigorously protested their acts at the four-party meetings in Saigon and they apologized and blamed the local security forces, whom they promised to punish. We were well aware that they were making empty promises just to get us to think that the Americans and their puppets had a plan to sabotage the Paris Agreement on both a small scale and a large scale.

Was not history repeating itself? The French had been heavily defeated and had to sign the Geneva Agreements in 1954, after which the Americans endeavored to prevent the agreements from being implemented. Today, the Americans and their puppets had suffered a heavy defeat and were trying to sabotage the Paris Agreement. However, we were people who were experienced. We had fought and negotiated in order to achieve agreements favorable to the revolution. We would struggle to implement all articles of those agreements. For the independence and freedom of the people, we were prepared to sacrifice and fight to the end. At the same time, we held out a hand of national reconciliation and concord in order to save those who had gone astray. But in view of our bloody experience in the past we were not so foolish as to believe that our enemies would sincerely carry out the agreements. Therefore, we were not surprised by such perfidy. We had drafted two plans to cope with two possible developments: first, because our struggle bore results and because of pressure from our people and the people of the world the enemy was forced to correctly implement the Paris Agreement; second, they would sabotage and abandon the agreements. It was all up to the enemy. We were attempting to bring about the first contingency, but we were prepared to cope with the second one.

On 1 February 1973, at the appointed hour, a flight of U.S. helicopters commanded by an American lieutenant colonel who was accompanied by a puppet officer, and flying along the course and at the altitude we had designated, made a circle around Loc Ninh and, one after the other, from the northern end of the air strip. While they were circling around they had clearly seen the air strip, the town and, more importantly, the large number of anti-aircraft positions and tanks, deployed in many perimeters around the town, which were prepared to respond if they tried any funny business. On that day the town of Loc Ninh was like a large festival. Revolutionary flags few everywhere. Especially, at the airfield there was a solemn, orderly atmosphere. A large number of people of all categories, cadres, and neatly dressed troops assembled and formed ranks. There was a forest of gold-starred red flags, mixed in with half-blue, half-red flags and countless banners and slogans applauding the victory of the Paris Agreements on Vietnam, demanding the strict and absolute implementation of the agreements, acclaiming the military delegation of the PRG of the RSVN, etc. A quick, seething, and spirited rally was held beside the waiting American helicopters. Many delegates representing the various circles and mass associations arose to make brief speeches in which they demanded peace and national concord, congratulated our delegation, and expressed confidence in the inevitable victory of the delegation's struggle. On behalf of the delegation, I expressed its gratitude to the cadres, enlisted men, and people who had come to applaud and solemnly see off the delegation, acknowledged the advice given the delegation, and promised to be worthy of that confidence. The U.S. officers and flight crews tried to appear civilized and stood looking on in silence, but the puppet officers were perplexed and angry and remained seated in the helicopters, not daring to come out.

After the rally was over, as ordered by the commander of the Loc Ninh airfield the U.S. helicopters started their engines. I turned and glanced at the comrades and people and gave a loving look at the scenery of Loc Ninh, then shook hands with everyone. I hugged and kissed comrade Van Pha, deputy head of the Regional Political Office, with whom I had participated in the "Nguyen Hue" campaign at Loc Ninh several years previously, and comrade Le The Thuong, in charge of propaganda-training in the region, with whom I had once traveled the entire length of the Truong Son trail. Comrade Thuong promised, "I'll send you a photograph I took of the people seeing you and our delegation off to Saigon." Our delegation members waved to the people, then the comrades, two abreast, solemnly boarded the helicopters, amidst the affection of the people and the forest of flags and flowers. The U.S. major commanding my helicopter was very polite, carefully inspecting my seat, then stepped down, stood at attention and saluted, invited me to board the helicopter, fastened my safety belt, then sat down in his seat. The helicopters took off in an orderly formation, circled once above the airfield, then headed straight for Saigon along Route 13. The large number of people at the airfield were not the only ones seeing us off: nearly everyone, people traveling along the road, standing in their yards and on the streets, or working in the rice paddies and potato fields around Loc Ninh stopped work to wave at us. That was an extremely moving, very peaceful scene in an area scarred with the devastation of war. What did the Americans in the helicopters, and the puppets think about that scene, which was completely in contrast to the scene a few days ago. The same helicopters had caused much death and separation for countless families; when

they flew overhead there was nothing below them, not a single person on the ground below! Suddenly the American major turned toward me and half jokingly, half seriously said, "You have won the war!"

The flock of helicopters followed Route 13 past Binh Long, Tau O, Chon Thanh, Bau Bang, Lai Khe, Ben Cat, etc. All of those places had been the location of many fierce battles between us and the American and puppet troops over the course of many years and still bore the marks of the glorious feats of arms of the diligent and heroic eastern Nam Bo troops. I looked down at the jungle, which previously consisted of thick growths of large and small trees but was now denuded and desolate. There were many bomb craters on the surface. Many long scars of devastation caused by B52 carpet bombing succeeded one another and criss-crossed one another in the devastated jungle. When they looked down from above, the Americans thought that nothing could survive where their B52's had passed over, so they boasted that the B52 were terrible gods of war. Then we flew over the Saigon River, the Binh Loi Bridge lying between two thick nets of steel, then An Phu Dong, then Tan Son Nhat. The helicopters landed in the military part of the airfield. Our delegation thanked the crew members and shook their hands. Looking neat in the tidy insignia-less liberation army uniforms, we formed into an orderly line on the runway. The officers carried briefcases and wore revolvers. The enlisted men wore floppy jungle hats and carried backpacks and AK rifles. Everyone wore the famous rubber sandals. I don't know whether the Americans and their puppets understood the significance of that or not, but the many Vietnamese and foreign reporters who were present at the airfield that day were very observant. They photographed us with movie cameras and still cameras. I smiled with delight when I noticed them photographing our rubber sandals. They said, "Wearing simple, proud rubber sandals, they sat foot on Tan Son Nhat. They entered Saigon, capital of the Republic of Vietnam, in the same rubber sandals they wore during Tet of 1968." (UPI, 1 February 1973). The reporters told the truth. Those rubber sandals had left their proud imprints on the streets of Saigon, at many important objectives, and even at Tan Son Nhat airfield, as well as all the other towns, cities, and municipalities in South Vietnam during Tet Mau Than, so that there could be the scene on that day--rubber sandals entering Saigon with good will--and so that some day it would be certain that the rubber sandals could return to Saigon yet another time--to a liberated Saigon. I looked at the line formed by the cadres and men of the delegation from one end to the other and felt very happy and proud. They had bright eyes and bright smiles and stood erect, looking correct and imposing, all of which expressed the confidence of victors. They were cadres and men from all battlefields and holding many different positions, and they were from many different components and of many different age groups. Some had served since the anti-French resistance war and some had answered the call of the simultaneous uprising. Some of them took up arms in Saigon during the Tet Offensive, and others had been in the army only a year but had contributed to the immortal Loc Ninh-Route 13 victory. They stood there like simple, ordinary, natural people before the lenses of the reporters and before the inquisitive, curious, and surprised eyes of the U.S.-puppet MP's who were standing around. From the crowd there came toward us people wearing the uniforms and insignia of the Hungarian and Polish armies. It turned out that they were our Hungarian and Polish comrades in the International Commission for Control and Supervision who had come to the airfield to greet us and

offer our delegation all necessary assistance. I intimately greeted those comrades and expressed my deep gratitude. After completing several simple forms, we got into black American Fords and Chevrolets to go to the delegation's headquarters--which the Americans and their puppets called "Camp David"--in Tan Son Nhat airfield.

Camp David, formerly a U.S. military camp, had been renovated. It consisted of many temporary wooden, sheet-metal roofed barracks arranged in straight rows, between which there were broad paths and occasionally a shade tree. It was very hot, especially at midday. In addition to the heat there was the roar of all kinds of airplanes and helicopters. The noise, which came from all directions, made everyone angry and irritable. It was difficult to think, work and relax. Fortunately, after the sun went down at dusk the area naturally became cooler, but there was no way to turn off the incessant noise. It was indeed a military camp. It was entirely adequate for soldiers in wartime, but fell far short of the minimum standards of a diplomatic delegation. They were clearly playing a dirty trick on us there. Perhaps they had spent a lot of effort to find an "appropriate" headquarters for both of our delegations: the military delegation of the government of the DRV and our delegation.

As soon as we entered the gate of the camp, Le Quang Hoa, Luu Van Loi, Ho Quang Hoa, Bui Thanh Tin and many other people I knew, practically the entire DRV delegation, rushed up and surrounded our convoy. Just after we got out of the car brother Hoa presented me with a bouquet of fresh lilies from Hanoi, then everyone hugged one another. There were sounds of laughter and backslapping. It was truly moving--especially the spirit of brotherhood among the children of the same mother--the motherland--who had writhed in misery and pain during years of warfare. It was truly heartwarming and happy when comrades-in-arms who had lived and died together on the battlefield and faced a cruel enemy, now met in the bosom of the enemy, surrounded by enemy troops, with one noble objective: struggling for peace and national concord.

I turned to hug and kiss Doang Huyen, deputy head of the military delegation of the PRG of the RSVN, who had gone to Saigon in advance to participate in meetings of deputy delegation heads and discuss the work procedures. Duong Dinh Thao, a member of our delegation who had also arrived at Saigon via Paris, anxiously relayed to me a letter and warm salutations and congratulations from Nguyen Thi Binh and our delegation in Paris.

The camp was divided into two parts: one side was reserved for brother Hoa's delegation and the other was reserved for my delegation. But the Americans and their puppets had the good intention of preparing for the two delegation heads a relatively decent house built in the duplex style: each of us had half of the house, including a living room, an office, a dining room, a bedroom and a bathroom. There was a door to each of the rooms, and there were airconditioning, bright lights, a telephone and other conveniences. We clearly understood their "good intentions." Therefore, we moved into other rooms and lived and worked with the others. We turned that house over to specialists so that they could inspect it. After searching around for days they showed us some very small microphones they had found under tables in the offices and livingrooms. We joked with one another that we didn't know whether they had been put there by

the Americans or by the puppets, or put there as a practical joke by carpenters who were also electronic technicians. There were many other such stories: jamming the radio channels we used to communicate with the base areas, obtaining copies of our telegrams, etc. But enough! It does no good to talk. Doubtlessly, that was a common story to the Americans in the age of electronics. What were those stories compared to the Watergate affair in Washington? The important thing was that we were aware of, and were on guard against, even the smallest detail. That was nothing less than the continuation of a war that had not yet ended. The enemy used every trick they could use, from modern weapons that could kill many people at a time to the most sophisticated electronic machinery, the radar and lasers used in the viewing and listening devices, from MacNamara's fence to Camp David. In its 15 March 1973 issue THE STARS AND STRIPES, the newspaper of the U.S. Army in the Pacific, admitted that "The United States had fought three long wars in this century. The Vietnam war was the largest war with regard to the number of bombs dropped and was also the largest with regard to the use of science and technology in warfare!"

That was a matter of abusing modern U.S. technology for aggressive purposes, to kill people and deceive others. As for the puppets, they had neither technology nor intelligence, so their U.S. masters assigned them the task of playing vile, petty tricks every day to give our delegation a hard time, such as limiting the food and goods a contractor could bring into Camp David, preventing the press, and especially the people, from meeting with and talking with our delegation, and seeking to restrict our travel, especially through Saigon, by causing delays, damaging our vehicles, having the escorting MP's arrive late, etc., then intimidating us with helicopters and tanks, and plotting to use money and women to bribe us. With regard to our regional delegations and local teams, the enemy's behavior was even worse. They provided bad, unsanitary, crowded, hot housing quarters which lacked all conveniences. For example, in the My Tho region they provided a recently remodeled chicken-coop in the Dong Tam base. The stench was still very strong. They provided poor-quality food. In one instance, at Hue, the canned goods were so old that they were wormy. At the four-party conference table in Saigon we continually and vigorously protested their treatment and demanded the formation of an investigating team. The Americans blamed the puppets. Major General Woodward, head of the U.S. delegation, pretended that "It is unfortunate that the U.S. delegation knows nothing about such deficiencies. The Republic of Vietnam is resonsible for such things. They have informed us that everything is in good shape." On such occasions, the puppets either clammed up or blamed the lower echelon, the local officials, or people who had not done their jobs properly, and then agreed to send an inspection team and promised to fix up the housing and provide additional equipment, but that was the end of it.

Furthermore, they organized gangs of hooligans and thugs to cooperate with their MP's and police to commit acts of violence against PLA officers who were members of the joint military commissions and teams by throwing rocks and trash, and even using steel rods, knives, and hammers to wound our men, such as Major Le Thanh Nhon and two captains on the Buon Me Thuot team, and six of our comrades at Hue. Comrade Tran Hon Ngo was hit on the head and knocked unconscious at Duc Pho in Quang Ngai Province while he was working with an investigation team of the joint commission. All of our officers and men in the joint

commissions and teams were people who had achieved many accomplishments in war on many battlefields and had fought very heroically, like tigers, in the battles. Now, on the new struggle front in the area controlled by the enemy, they always had confidence in the just cause and in the inevitable victory of the revolution, were very calm and steadfast, and did not waver in the face of ugly acts, intimidation, or attempted bribery. We are very proud of them and are grateful to the troops of Uncle Ho who were very ordinary but were indomitable, had military bearing and didn't blink an eye.

Why did the Americans and their puppets play such cheap tricks? Certainly not to create a wholesome atmosphere in order to cooperate in correctly implementing the agreements, and certainly not to create an atmosphere of national reconciliation and concord after years of enmity because of the destructive warfare. How could reasoning people subjected to such acts by the United States and its puppets still believe that they truly wanted to end the war and bring about peace? Clearly, they brazenly and without hiding their perfidious faces intended to sabotage the agreement.

The most important aspect of the agreement, and the first matter that had to be implemented, was the ceasefire. Articles 2 and 3 of the agreement and the protocol on the ceasefire made clear and specific stipulations about the complete cessation of hostilities, the forces remaining in their original positions, etc. But after 28 January 1973, the day on which the ceasefire took effect (and until 30 April 1975), it was ironic that there was not a day on which the guns fell silent on any of the battlefields in South Vietnam.

On the very hour the ceasefire was to take effect, Thieu's puppet administration sent a task force led by tanks on an operation to take Cua Viet from us. There we put up a very stiff resistance, annihilated the encroaching enemy troops, and maintained the liberated area. Thus at the four-party conference table our side held the upper hand in denouncing their violation of the agreement. Lt Gen Ngo Du, head of the puppet delegation argued that we had occupied Cua Viet at 0758 on the morning of 28 January (the ceasefire was to take effect at 0800 on the morning of 28 January). I responded, "But we liberated Cua Viet in May 1972. We have all kinds of clear evidence about the illegal encroachment by your army after the ceasefire. But I would like to inform you of a report we have just received that thanks to their high degree of vigilance our liberation troops have annihilated the encroaching troops and defeated that adventuristic act, after having tried to use loudspeakers to appeal for them to retreat and not violate the agreement, but to no avail. That is a lesson for those who do not want to respect the agreement and not respect their signature." Their faces paled and they were bitter.

In order to prevent enemy airplanes from flying over areas under our control, we demanded an immediate discussion of Article 3 of the protocol regarding the ceasefire: "The joint military commissions will reach agreements regarding the corridors, routes, and other stipulations regarding the movement of military transport aircraft and military transport ships and boats of one side which must pass through an area controlled by the other side." Both the U.S. and puppet delegations regarded that matter as being unnecessary. But during the meeting on 16 February the American side urgently announced that a C47 had been

shot down south of An Loc and two U.S. crewmen had been seriously wounded. During all of the following meetings the Americans protested and demanded the appointment of an investigating team. I agreed to the investigation but stressed that since the Four-Party Joint Military Commission had not yet reached agreement regarding the flight paths, altitude, etc., of airplanes flying over areas controlled by the liberation troops, no one can accept responsibility for their safety. Ultimately, the Americans had to shut up and forget the incident. Clearly, by basing ourselves on the legality of the agreements while resolutely protesting the violations we forced the Americans and puppets to respect us. In places where we were weak and careless on the battlefield, even if the enemy was 100 percent guilty of a violation it would still argue obstinately, regardless of our protests. An example was the puppets' taking of Sa Huynh in Quang Ngai which we had liberated in 1972, along with a relatively long stretch of National Route 1. After the ceasefire took effect the puppets launched a division-sized operation to retake that area in order to restore their communications on Route 1. We vigorously exposed that violation and demanded that an investigation team be sent there, but the Americans and puppets ignored our demand and considered the incident closed. After 28 January the enemy also launched continuous operations to take villages and hamlets along Route 4 in My Tho which we had controlled prior to 28 January, and set up outposts deep in our territory. In that area, because our forces were not on guard and were afraid that if they retaliated they would violate the agreements, the enemy was able to occupy those places and fraudulently claim at the conference table that the area belonged to them. The ceasefire was the heart of the agreement but the Thieu puppet regime completely ignored it and brazenly sabotaged the heart of the agreement. Their 1973 "Ly Thuong Kiet" plan set forth five major strategic goals:

--Encroachment and pacification were the central measures.

--The pillar was building a strong army and a strong governmental administration. Within 5 years the ARVN would be made younger and more effective, and would be modernized.

--Sabotaging the parts of the Paris Agreement on Vietnam which were not beneficial for the Republic of Vietnam.

--Restoring the economic level of 1973-1974 in the 1973-1978 long-range plan, especially with regard to industry, accompanied by the economic blockading of the enemy.

--Maintaining the deterrent force of the U.S. air and naval forces in Southeast Asia.

They also endeavored to carry out "land grabbing" operations and "flag planting" operations in which infantry and helicopters were used to plant flags. They prepared 1.6 million three-barred puppet flags for that task.

The 6 April 1973 report of the Committee To Denounce War Crimes in Vietnam concluded that "In the 2-month period between 28 January and 28 March 1973, the Saigon administration violated the Paris Agreement more than 70,000 times,

including 19,770 land-grabbing operations, 23 artillery shellings, 3,375 bombings and straffings of liberated areas, and 21,075 police operations in areas under their control."

According to enemy data, as of October 1973 they had set up 1,180 outposts in South Vietnam and controlled 7,258 hamlets more than they did prior to 28 January 1973.*

Clearly, although the United States and its puppets had signed the agreement they continued to act imperturbably in accordance with their existing plans, and endeavored to pacify, encroach, and build a strong army in order to change the balance of forces in their favor and gain complete control of South Vietnam. At a meeting of the two South Vietnamese delegations in March 1973, Lt Gen Du Quoc Dong, who had replaced Ngo Du as head of the puppet delegation, when he had been put in a bad position showed his true face by saying, "I don't approve of the Paris Agreement because it only benefits your side." I sternly criticized him, "So it is clear: Lt Gen Du Quoc Dong is representing the Republic of Vietnam in the implementation of an agreement of which he does not approve, and indeed opposes. It is evident and clear that your side is violating and sabotaging the agreement." He hastily corrected himself, "I personally do not approve of it...but...because the agreement has been reached, we must carry it out!"

As everyone knows, before the Paris Agreement was signed the United States urgently sent weapons and war facilities to South Vietnam to bolster the puppet army, make up for the puppets' heavy losses in 1972, and build up a sufficient stockpile so that the puppet army could continue to be strong after the Americans withdrew. Kissinger had often declared during press conferences in the United States that "After the Americans withdraw, the Republic of Vietnam must continue to be strong." That work continued at a rapid pace after the agreement took effect. Many documents have clearly recorded the figures, the world press had written much about them, and there are ample statistics, so I believe that it is unnecessary to repeat them here.

Furthermore the U.S. and vassal troops were required to withdraw completely from South Vietnam in accordance with the agreement, but they turned over to Thieu's army their modern equipment supply depots, and bases.

Articles 5 and 6 of the agreement stipulated that all troops, military advisers and military personnel, including military technical personnel, military personnel attached to the pacification program, and the weapons, ammunition, and war materiel of the United States and the other foreign countries, would have to be completely withdrawn from South Vietnam within 60 days after the signing of the agreement, and that all military bases of the United States and the other foreign countries were to be dismantled. The protocol on the ceasefire also stated in Article 8 that "The United States and the other foreign countries mentioned in Article 5 of the agreement will take with them all of their weapons, ammunition and military equipment."

*Documents captured from the enemy after the liberation and now held at the B2 War Recapitulation Section of the Ministry of National Defense.

In order to insure the correct implementation of those articles, Article 3 stated clearly that beginning with the ceasefire the forces of the United States would remain in their original positions while awaiting a troop withdrawal plan. The Four-Party Joint Military Commission would stipulate the procedures.

The Four-Party Joint Military Commission was responsible for coordinating monitoring and investigating the implementation of Articles 3, 5 and 6. Especially, the International Commission was required to control and supervise the implementation of those articles.

During the meetings of the delegation heads of the four parties at Tan Son Nhat we continually requested the U.S. delegation to inform us of its plan to withdraw troops and dismantle its military bases so that joint inspection teams could monitor and inspect its implementation. It was the same every day: Major General Woodward, head of the U.S. delegation, hemmed and hawed and turned to other matters. But one day he solemnly announced "The results of the strict implementation of the agreements on the part of the United States, which has disarmed torpedoes and mines...." He spoke distinctly about numbers, time, space, etc. When he reached the part about withdrawing troops he said, "Eight thousand troops, including those of the Allies, have been withdrawn from South Vietnam." I immediately protested, "We cannot accept such a perfunctory report by the U.S. delegation. No one can believe the 8,000 figure or any other figure Major General Woodward gives out, without thinking that it could be false. I believe that any withdrawal of U.S. troops or the troops of any other foreign country must be announced in advance so that there can be on-the-spot monitoring and inspection by the Four-Party Joint Military Commission as well as the control and supervision of the International Commission, as has been stipulated. Otherwise, no figures can have any value. As far as I am concerned, to date not a single U.S. soldier, or a soldier from any other country, has left South Vietnam."

Many days later, on 16 February 1973, the Americans sent us a diplomatic not officially agreeing that joint four-party military teams could go to the various locations to observe the withdrawal of U.S. and South Korean troops and could take photographs. Thus they had to make a concession. From those observations it was clear that although when they arrived in Vietnam the U.S. and South Korean troops had been armed to the teeth, when they left they carried no weapons at all, but only sleeping bags, personal effects, and such tacky souvenirs as earthenware and porcelain elephants, stonewar from Marble Mountain, etc. When our men asked about that they were told, "Our weapons and equipment have been sent by ship." Such was their deception!

Only after their total defeat in 1975 did the Americans, dumbfounded over the fact that although they used every trick to provide the puppet army with much equipment it was still defeated, angrily admit the truth: "With the enormous quantity of equipment and materiel left behind when our forces withdrew, added to the aid provided subsequently, the ARVN forces should have been fully capable of coping with the enemy." (From the concluding Chapter 10 of the book "The Last Helicopter," by Weldon A. Brown.)

How about the dismantling of military bases?

The American Major General Woodward solemnly reported that "We are authorized to reply to you that at present we have no bases in South Vietnam. All of them were turned over to the Republic of Vietnam prior to the signing of the agreement. The American troops are now stationed in camps temporarily borrowed from the Republic of Vietnam."

That was a deception that was brazen beyond words.

Once the imperialists had drafted a plan and had objectives, they acted in the style of aggressors, lying brazenly no matter to whom they were talking.

The International Commission should have been fully capable of exposing those dishonest acts, and of reaching accurate conclusions and condemning violations of the agreement by the Americans and puppets in order to prevent them from sabotaging the agreement and continuing the war. Four countries--Hungary, Poland, Indonesia and Canada--participated in the International Commission. After Canada withdrew it was replaced by Iran, which worked in accordance with the principle of consultation and unanimity.

It must be frankly said that Canada practically belonged to the Americans and took the Americans' part in the International Commission, arguing, glossing over and, when necessary, vetoing. The head of the Canadian delegation, Ambassador Gauvin, was outwardly courteous but was said to be a person who was dogmatic, overbearing, domineering and looked down on others. One day Gauvin indicated that he wanted to make a courtesy call on the delegation of the PRG of the RSVN. We were quite willing and regarded that as a good opportunity to speak frankly with that representative of the International Commission. I received him in a living room that had been prepared as decently as conditions in Camp David allowed. I went out to his car to greet the ambassador, escorted him inside, and invited him to sit with me on a divan, the most ceremonious seat in the living room. Accompanying him were a political aide of the Canadian delegation, and a number of others. The person who did most of the interpreting during that meeting was our interpreter, comrade Dung, who interpreted for me during all of the meetings of the heads of the four-party delegations. Dung was a remarkable youth who spoke English fluently in a strong voice and knew how to stress the essential passages.

After the exchange of pleasantries Gauvin spoke of the role and accomplishments of the International Commission, especially during the period in which Gauvin served as its chairman, regarding the ceasefire, the exchange of prisoners, the withdrawal of U.S. and vassal troops from South Vietnam, etc. By doing so he wanted to speak of the effectiveness of the International Commission and its objectivity and fairness and, especially, unjustly criticize us in an accusatory, threatening voice by saying that there had as yet been no ceasefire because of our many violations on the battlefield. I sat listening to him very calmly and politely, both patiently listening and understanding the significance of each word. Even the ambassador realized that he had spoken too long and looked at me inquisitively. I calmly invited my guest to eat some fruit and smoke a cigarette. Then I began to speak:

"My dear Ambassador Gauvin, you have spoken very accurately of the very important role and the very necessary objectivity of the International Commission for Control and Supervision in implementing the agreement. I am sincerely sorry that the sound of gunfire can be heard all over, that although agreement has been reached to end the war and restore peace in Vietnam the devastating war of the past several decades is continuing. I believe that no people in the world desire peace more ardently than the people of Vietnam, who have fought and borne hardships in the cause of justice. But, Mr Ambassador, there is a reason for everything. I would like to turn for you a few pages of recent history. Our nation won independence in 1945. The French colonialists again invaded our country. Only by fighting 9 years, the outstanding victory during which was the battle of Dien Bien Phu, were we able to achieve the signing of the Geneva Agreement. During that period there was also an International Control Commission of which Canada was a member. I'm sure you are well aware of that." Gauvin nodded his head in agreement. I continued, "But Nixon, who was then the U.S. vice president, declared to the press that 'Although France has signed a treaty to end hostilities in Indochina, the United States will act alone if necessary and will send troops to that part of the world.' That was reported by THE NEW YORK TIMES. That is indeed what the United States did."

Gauvin made a motion with his hand to interrupt the interpreter and began to speak at length. I said to Dung, "Continue to interpret what I say. Only after I have finished should you listen to and interpret what he has to say." Dung, unperturbed, continued to interpret for me.

"I would like to bring some figures to your attention, Mr Ambassador. Between 1955 and 1960 more than 800 U.S. ships carrying weapons and war facilities of various kinds arrived at the ports of Vietnam, especially Da Nang. During the same period $600 million worth of aid was given to the Ngo Dinh Diem regime. The whole world knows about that. That was a brazen violation of the Geneva Agreement. But the International Commission at that time did not stop those illegal acts because it ignored them, covered them up, or was under pressure. So the guns continued to fire and the war continued on our Vietnamese soil. Canada was an important part of the International Commission at that time and cannot, of course, deny its great responsibility."

Gauvin again interrupted and would have gone on talking if I had not instructed Dung to continue to interpret what I was saying and to speak in a voice louder than Gauvin's.

Dung, who was indeed a remarkable youth, drowned out what Gauvin was saying, forcing Gauvin to stop talking and listen to me. He appeared to be surprised, perhaps because he had never before failed to dominate others and been restricted in such a way. I continued, "Events are now repeating themselves. Before and after the Paris Agreement the Americans shipped weapons and equipment to the ARVN so that it could sabotage the agreement and carry out land-grabbing and pacification campaigns. Furthermore, although the U.S. and other foreign troops returned to their countries they left their weapons, facilities, supply depots, and bases to the army of the Thieu regime, which was a brazen violation of the Paris Agreement."

At that point Gauvin, as if he could stand no more, jumped up, waved his hand vigorously, and mumbled a few words. I had to calm him down: "Mr Ambassador, please take it easy. I only want to say a few more words, then you may have your turn." Then I continued.

"This time, if we, the International Commission, and the Four-Party Joint Military Commission do not cooperately closely with one another, try to operate together objectively and effectively, and stop all such violations, I believe that the sound of gunfire will continue to be heard. That will not be surprising, and the reason will be clear. Our responsibility to history is great but we have not met the desires for peace of the people of Vietnam, the people of Canada, and the peace-loving people of the world. What will the Canadian government, which has twice participated in the international commissions under two treaties, think about its role?

Now Gauvin no longer appeared so eager to speak. His attitude softened. "Dear Lt Gen Tran Van Tra," he said, "I admit that I know nothing about the Geneva Agreement. I know nothing about what happened then." Then the ambassador changed the subject and talked about the weather in Saigon and the various kinds of fruit in Vietnam.

I pleasantly invited my guest to drink beer and soft drinks. Everyone tried to maintain a friendly atmosphere.

Gauvin again spoke and recalled a big reception he had organized in Saigon for Sharp, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs who came here on an official visit. In addition to all the "bigshots" of the Saigon puppet regime and the U.S. Ambassador Bunker, he invited members of the International Commission and of the Four-Party Joint Military Mission, including ourselves.

"General Tran Van Tra was truly the star of that reception, a star in the sky of Saigon that day," he said. "Dear Mr Ambassador," I replied, "that was the star of the just cause of the PRG of the RSVN, which I have the honor of representing here!" "No, no," he said, "I was speaking of your outstanding individual role."

He was attempting to avoid praising the PRG of the RSVN, although it had long had indisputable prestige, not only in Saigon but at Paris and in the world. In order to oppose it, the United States and the puppet Thieu regime adopted the principle that in South Vietnam there existed only one government, that of Thieu's Republic of Vietnam. The United States and China had agreed to that principle during the "Nixon-Mao Zedong-Zhou Enlai political conference which resulted in the Shanghai Communique.

He continued, "You are a great soldier," Now I was truly at a loss. I clearly understood his posturing but did not suspect that he would praise me so highly. Luckily, I suddenly remembered an appraisal of our soldiers by UPI in 1964: "The Viet Cong guerrillas are mythical figures. They are an enemy worthy of fearing, a foe everyone must respect." In 1965 the magazine U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT wrote that "The Viet Cong guerrillas are the most skilled and the greatest in the history of mankind."

I smiled broadly and said, "I thank you for your compliments. The truth is that out of patriotism and love for the people, and because 'there is nothing more precious than independence and freedom,' our liberation fighters have sacrificed their lives in combat and have won victory. The American press and news agencies, as well as those of the world, have called them mythical figures, the most skilled, greatest fighters. I am truly proud to represent them in Saigon in order to struggle for the correct implementation of the agreement they won only by shedding much blood."

Then Ambassador Gauvin excused himself and left. He suggested that we have a souvenir photograph taken. Gauvin handed the camera he had brought along to our photographer so that he could take a few snapshots.

The 60 days we spent in Saigon with the Four-Party Joint Military Commission were pressing, tense days. Our two military delegations did all they could to struggle for the implementation of the agreement, but the results were limited. The comrades of the Hungarian and Polish delegations to the International Commission, with an international spirit and ardent brotherhood, cooperated closely with us in struggling, protecting one another, and helping one another.

Our comrade Major General Xuyt"[phonetic], deputy head of the Hungarian delegation to the International Commission, a big man who looked husky in his Hungarian army uniform, during the first working session said in a sincere voice, "The party, state, army and people of Hungary have sent us to Vietnam for the sake of the peace and well-being of the Vietnamese people, and for world peace. We regard the success of the Vietnamese revolution as our success and are thus ready to lay down our lives for it. That is the principle which guides all of our actions. We are not afraid of death and of course are not afraid of hardship."

I was very grateful for the heartfelt words of the emissary of the working class who had come from a faraway land to help us during a difficult period, in a spirit of noble international proletarianism!

It would be impossible to relate everything we accomplished or failed to accomplish during those 60 days. Because the Americans and puppets had objectives and plans that had been prepared in advance, the key problem--the ceasefire--could not be resolved. The war continued. Let us listen to what Thieu had to say to the puppet officers at Thu Duc:

"The Republic of Vietnam will implement the ceasefire provisions only when:

"1. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam no longer supports me.

"2. When American military aid is only sufficient for defensive purposes.

"3. When the military forces of the Republic of Vietnam are no longer capable of defending the important areas of South Vietnam."

Clearly, the loyal lackey of the Americans thought that he would be victorious, so he obstinately sabotaged the ceasefire and continued the war as if there had been no agreement!

The American and vassal troops had withdrawn. The vassal troops of the Americans who had sold themselves to the Americans to participate in killing our people, such as the Australians, New Zealanders, Thai, and South Koreans, had completely withdrawn from our country. In the morning of 15 March 1973 USARV, the U.S. Army Command in Vietnam, conducted a flag-folding ceremony and bugged out. In the afternoon, MACV, the U.S. Military Assistance Command in Vietnam, actually the U.S. GHQ which commanded all U.S. troops, the vassal troops, and Thieu's army and the imposing U.S. aggressive war apparatus in Vietnam, the Tan Son Nhat headquarters of which had been dubbed the "Pentagon of the East" by the press, also pulled down and folded its flag.

Whether by accident or by clever design, the next day the military delegations of the DRV and the PRG of the RSVN drove into the courtyard of that "Pentagon of the East." The two delegations got out of their cars and advanced directly into the reception room, past two rows of American MP's who stood at attention and saluted, in order to attend a party organized by the major general who headed the U.S. delegation. We laughed, drank American whiskey, and talked about the weather and peace in Vietnam, in the "Pentagon of the East."

Thus the U.S. troops also got out. But, as stated above, they left behind all kinds of weapons, military bases, and even officers in civilian clothing, to prop up the Thieu regime.

With regard to the exchange of prisoners in accordance with the agreement, we succeeded in securing the release of our people who had been captured during the war. Maj Nguyen Thi Dung, a member of our military delegation, was responsible for the POW exchange. She was very active and aggressive, visiting all of the puppet prisons, from Bien Hoa to Con Dao and Phu Quoc. She was the only female member of the four military delegations, spoke French and English fluently, was attractive and polite, and struggled resolutely, which won the respect of the Americans and puppets. We were proud of her. She worked at disseminating the articles of the agreement regarding the exchange of POW's to our men who were still imprisoned, struggled for the improvement of prison conditions, and demanded the return of those who were still detained. The enemy did not return everyone and were not sincere, but we were able to liberate a considerable number of our cadres and men, people who had fought heroically but had fallen into the hands of the enemy and had been subjected to their barbarous treatment.

We returned all American and puppet POW's we were detaining.

But another important matter was that in the course of the 60 days of face-to-face meetings with the enemy we gained better understanding of them. The Americans were only interested in obtaining the release of their POW's as a gift to the American people, and in bringing the U.S. troops home, as demanded by the American people. Otherwise, they continued to implement their policy of Vietnamizing the war so that they could remain in Vietnam. The puppets adhered to Thieu's "four nos" slogan: no concession of land to the "communists," no neutrality, no coalition with the "communists," and no talking with the "communists." Although the puppets were forced to negotiate with us at the two-party talks at Tan Son Nhat, in fact they continued to adhere to their "four nos" principles and did not negotiate with us in good faith, but argued about

everything, made careless statements, and agreed to something one day only to change their minds the next day. They even reneged and refused to implement the first and smallest matter--the color of the flag and the insignia--of the Four-Party Joint Military Commission--which was agreed upon at the meeting of deputy delegation heads on 31 January 1973. That decision was that the flag, arm bands, and insignia on the vehicles, boats, and aircraft of the Joint Military Commission were to be orange in color. During a meeting of delegation heads they recommended that the matter be reconsidered and that another color be selected. We rejected that recommendation. What had been agreed to should be carried out, and not reneged on. In the middle of a meeting, during a break, Brig Gen Phan Hoa Hiep, deputy head of the puppet delegation, sat down beside me and whispered, "You don't know me but I know you well." I asked him, "When did we meet?" Hiep replied, "I was a soldier in the 3d Division (at the time of the August Revolution 1945). It's too bad the bigwigs at that time were at odds with one another. Otherwise I might still be a resistance fighter under your command." He chuckled when he said that. What he said was correct. The "big wigs" to whom he referred included me. At the beginning of the resistance war I commanded a unit called the Hoc Mon-Ba Diem-Duc Hoa Interdistrict Liberation Unit, which operated around Saigon. Nguyen Hoa Hiep was commander of the 3d Division and Ly Hue Vinh was commander of the 4th Division. The 4th Division fell apart as soon as the French returned in 1945. The 3d Division disintegrated and surrendered to the French within a brief period of time. I disarmed some of the units of those two divisions which had been robbing and attacking the people in Nhuan Duc, An Nhon Tay, Hoc Mon-Gia Dinh, My Tho, and Duc Hoa (Long An). It was said that Phan Hoa Hiep's family name was in fact not "Phan" but a transliteration of "Francois" into "Phan Hoa," for his real name was Francois Hiep, son of a French father and a Vietnamese mother. When I related that rumor to him he tried to ingratiate with me, called himself my youngest brother and pleaded for his "older brother" to agree to change the color of the flag.

"Orange is close to red," he said, "It makes us mad to see it." He had degraded himself to youngest brother, so I took the part of the eldest brother and said, "Why do you get mad? Red is the splendid, brilliant color of the future, and is nothing to be afraid of. You should know that orange is in common use internationally. It is very visible, even from far away. That color is the most appropriate and is attractive. Furthermore, what has been agreed to should be carried out, not haggled back and forth, which wastes time. There are still many things remaining to be done." He continued to plead with me but I resolutely turned him down. Even so, the puppets refused to carry out the agreement. There were many stories similar to the orange color story.

According to the agreement, the Four-Party Joint Military Commission would cease operations after 60 days. But near the end of that period, according to American sources and the Saigon press, the Four-Party Joint Military Commission would be extended. We didn't know what they were up to. Was it in order to prolong the legal presence of the U.S. delegation? Was it that the puppets wanted to remain under the protection of their American masters? Was it to keep the DRV delegation there in hopes of resolving a number of other problems that benefited the Americans, such as searching for missing U.S. military personnel? Was it to weaken the role of the PRG of the RSVN? But we resolutely

prepared for the U.S. military delegation to return to America and for brother Hoa's delegation to return to Hanoi. As for our delegation, when the change was made to the Two-Party Joint Military Commission, the Central Committee decided that Maj Gen Hoang Anh Tuan would head the military delegation of the PRG of the RSVN. Of course, I would leave, but my departure became a problem. Would I go to Hanoi? There was reason to do so. Would I go to Loc Ninh? The Americans and puppets would give us a hard time, and would either not provide facilities or carry out some nefarious plot. We knew that at least the Americans and puppets wanted to keep me at Tan Son Nhat. To allow a top-ranking officer--in their estimation--to return to the battlefield would be to "turn a tiger loose in the jungle." It would be useful to keep such a person in their grasp as a hostage.

We had long known that everything was decided by the American masters. The puppets were merely the dutiful servants. The preceding 60 days had made us even more convinced of that. In that matter as well as in many others, if the Americans agreed everything would go smoothly. We had to get the Americans to agree to take me to Hanoi.

On the night of 29 March I invited Woodward, head of the U.S. delegation, to our delegation's headquarters at Camp David. At the designated hour Woodward, Brigadier General Wickham--deputy head of the U.S. delegation--and the interpreter Major Sauvagio, who wore a green beret and had been an advisor for the puppet regime's pacification cadre training school at Vung Tau, arrived.

I informed Woodward that because our communications were difficult I had only just received a delayed message that there was one additional American POW our forces were holding in Tra Vinh Province. In order to express our good will and correctly implement the Paris Agreement, we wanted to turn him over to the Americans. On the following day the two sides would assign cadres to carry out the turning over of that last American POW. I said that personally I regarded that as a friendship gift to the lieutenant general to commemorate the 60 days we worked together on the Four-Party Joint Military Commission (my intention was to suggest that because of that Woodward would be commended and promoted).

Woodward was openly very pleased, thanked me profusely and, in order to express his gratitude, inquired about my health and asked if I had any plans for the future.

It was a question that was asked at the right place and at the right time. That was all I could hope for. I replied that I planned to take a trip to Hanoi and, along the way, visit Laos. Woodward and Wickham thought that I intended to help resolve the question of American and puppet POW's in Laos, but could not say so. Woodward appeared to be very anxious and asked, "When do you plan to go?" "I'll go tomorrow if you'll provide the means." He replied, "You will have the means. I'll arrange for a C130 flight to Hanoi tomorrow morning."

I expressed my gratitude and reminded him that on the following morning one of our officers would meet with the American officer to arrange the turning over of the POW at Tra Vinh. He thanked me and asked me whether the C130 should

wait to bring me back. If not, how would I return? (the U.S. delegation would cease operations and return to the United States on 31 March. After that date it would be necessary to use a puppet facility).

I smiled and said that I might return to Saigon by way of Paris, so that I could visit another famous European capital (Woodward thought that I needed to meet with our delegation in Paris).

Woodward was very pleased, said that that was a good idea, and said goodbye. He did not forget to affirm that an airplane would be available on the following morning.

On the morning of 30 April 1973 the puppet officer who brought a convoy of sedans to pick me up at my residence and take me to the ramp of the airplane was very deferential. Accompanying me to the airfield to see me off to Hanoi were Maj Gen Le Quang Hoa, Major General Woodward, head of the U.S. delegation and his wife. I warmly shook hands with and said goodbye to everyone. The warm, affectionate, and extremely moving handshakes secretly signified a victory and the sympathetic handshakes secretly expressed mutual gratitude. Woodward wished me a safe journey and good luck, and said that he would send an airplane to Hanoi to bring me back, even though I had not requested him to do so. I wished Mr and Mrs Woodward good fortune, stepped aboard the airplane, and waved to everyone. Thus aboard the American C130 (the Americans were courteous enough to provide a seat for me in the cockpit) I, Lt Col Nguyen Quang Minh (a research cadre with the Joint Commission), Dr Le Hoai Liem, the intepreter Dung, the bodyguard Hoa, and a number of other cadres, would fly from Saigon to Hanoi, thus ending 60 days of very seething and tense activity in the bosom of the enemy.

Sitting aboard the airplane and for the first time flying the length of the country, from Saigon to Hanoi, I felt disturbed and moved. There it was, a country that had existed 4,000 years and had been built by the blood and sweat of countless generations, in the past and in the present. The fresh green villages, the endless mountains and jungles, the long coastline with white sand beaches, and the immense blue continental shelf were truly a phantasmagoria. The gentle rays of the bright March sky embellished the scene with marvelous, sparkling colors. It was very beautiful, that homeland of ours. Also very beautiful were the heroism, intelligence, creativity, and persistent labor, generation after generation, of the millions of Vietnamese who built the beautiful country of today. I was very grateful for my ancestors and suddenly I remembered Uncle Ho and what he once told our troops in the Hung Temple on the side of Mt. Nghia: "The Hung kings achieved merit by founding the nation; you and I must work together to preserve it."

The words of Uncle Ho have been deeply engraved in the hearts of the Vietnamese people. No enemy, even the chief imperialists from across the Pacific or the shameless expansionists from the north, will be smashed to smithereens and be chased out of our country. Le Chieu Thong in the past, and Nguyen Van Thieu in the present, will live in infamy. Our homeland was certain to be independent, free and unified by any means.

The airplane was flying over the Red River Delta! Hanoi--our beloved capital and the heart of the homeland. I had lived in Hanoi for a long time and had worked there. Several times I had left it and returned. But this time was somehow different: I was strangely excited and moved, as if I were a child who had been far away for a long time wrestling with the difficulties and dangers of life and now was suddenly able to return to my warm home and be with my sweet, beloved mother. I was home: the child had returned to his sweet mother, so that he could again prepare to set out on another distant journey completely different from the one he had just taken.

Three days later a C130 from Saigon landed at Gia Lam airfield to pick me up--just as Woodward had promised. I sent Lt Col Nguyen Quang Minh to inform the American officer commanding the airplane that I was not yet able to leave. Comrade Minh wrote a notice stating that Lt Gen Tran Van Tra was busy and could not leave, and authorizing the airplane to return to Tan Son Nhat without having to return to Hanoi at a later date to pick him up. He did not forget to express my thanks.

In my extreme happiness over being able to return to our beloved capital, and with a feeling of freedom and relaxation from being with my friends, comrades and compatriots, I thought fondly of my comrades who were still at Tan Son Nhat. Because of a mission that was indispensable in the present phase of the struggle, those comrades had to live and work in a tense atmosphere while surrounded by the enemy, for how long no one knew. In the future, what would happen to those comrades at the hands of the obstinate and insidious enemy? I calmed myself by thinking that those of us in the liberated area must go all-out and cooperate closely with those comrades in order to win victory for the revolution. It was certain that those comrades would not be isolated, for they had us and the people, even in Saigon. One day we would meet again to celebrate the victory.